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Report of the Secretary-General on preparations for an international conference on the Great Lakes region

I. Introduction

1. The Security Council has proposed, on various occasions, starting with the presidential statement of 14 October 1994 on the situation concerning Rwanda, the convening, at an appropriate time, of an international conference on the Great Lakes region under the auspices of the United Nations and the African Union (AU). In particular, in its presidential statement of 24 April 1997 on the situation in the Great Lakes region, the Council, after reaffirming the importance of holding a conference, requested me to keep it regularly informed of developments in the Great Lakes region.

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to the presidential statement of 24 April 1997 and other relevant statements and resolutions, including resolutions 1457 (2003) and 1493 (2003). After a brief section on the background, the report provides an account of developments leading to the launching of the preparatory process for the conference; describes the organization of the conference as envisaged by the countries concerned; highlights the role of the region and of the international community; and provides an assessment of the way forward.

II. Background

3. The Security Council's call for an international conference on the Great Lakes region entails the recognition of three crucial issues regarding the situation in the region: first, that the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had regional dimensions; second, that the people of the Great Lakes region are so interlinked socially, economically, culturally and linguistically that instability initially generated by internal causes in one country could quickly spread to create a dynamic of conflicts in the entire region; and, third, that solutions to the conflicts and instability in each of the countries concerned can be effectively addressed only within a regional framework.

4. In addition to the Security Council's support for an international conference on the Great Lakes region, many countries within and outside the region, encouraged by important advances in the peace processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, have recently called on the United Nations and the African Union to speed up the organization of the conference. The holding of the conference

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would help to tackle the interlocking root causes of the region's conflicts in a comprehensive manner and consolidate peace at the national level. During the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, many delegations urged the United Nations and the Commission of the African Union to redouble their efforts to expedite the convening of the conference. The Executive Council of the African Union, meeting at Maputo from 4 to 8 July 2003, after reiterating the support of AU for the proposed conference, expressed satisfaction that the preparatory process had begun and encouraged the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union to pursue his efforts in concert with the United Nations and the States of the region and take all the necessary measures to support the preparatory process, thereby contributing to the success of the conference (decision 45 (III)).

III. Developments leading to the launching of the preparatory process

5. The first concrete steps towards the organization of the conference were taken in 1996 and 1997 when I asked my Special Envoys for the Great Lakes region to explore, among other things, the possibility of convening an international conference on peace, security and development in the region. In order to expedite the process, in 1999 I appointed a Special Representative based in Nairobi to consult with the leaders of the region on the feasibility, objectives and organization of such a conference.

6. Those consultations were undertaken in close partnership with the African Union by a joint United Nations/AU delegation composed of my Special Representative for the Great Lakes region and the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission. As a result, and on the basis of a concept paper submitted to them in 2001, the core countries, namely, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, agreed to the proposed international conference. They stressed that the conference should be action-oriented and focus on specific issues, that it should be owned by the region, and that its outcome should promote sustainable peace, political stability, effective economic development, and regional integration.

7. The core countries launched the preparatory process at the meeting of National Coordinators, held at Nairobi on 23 and 24 June 2003. The Nairobi meeting, jointly chaired by the United Nations and the African Union, also agreed to revise and update the concept paper and to use it as a working document during the preparatory process. The meeting was essential in determining the future direction that the conference would take and its main features, including its timetable, structure and themes.

IV. Organization of the conference

Objectives and rationale

8. The purpose of the conference, under United Nations and AU partnership, is to initiate a process that will bring together the leaders of the countries of the Great Lakes region to reach an agreement on a set of principles — good-neighbourly relations, stability, peace, development etc. — and articulate and launch selected programmes of action with a view to helping to end the cycle of conflict and ensure durable peace, stability, security, democracy and development in the whole region.

The objective of the conference is to establish a regional framework that would facilitate the adoption and implementation of a stability, security and development pact around four main thematic areas: (a) peace and security; (b) democracy and good governance; (c) economic development and regional integration; and (d) humanitarian and social issues.

9. While it will be up to the core countries of the region to determine the outcome of the conference, the Stability, Security and Development Pact may, at this early juncture, be seen as including broad policy statements on regional peace and security; good governance and human rights monitoring mechanisms; development and regional integration projects in areas such as energy, transport, infrastructure and information; policies and mechanisms on social and humanitarian issues (internally displaced persons, refugees etc.); and programmes to address endemic diseases. It should be stressed once more that it is for the core countries to determine the priorities and the content of any agreement that may be adopted by the conference.

Participation

10. The process is designed to be as inclusive as possible and efforts are being made to involve, in addition to the core countries, other stakeholders, including representatives of the civil society in those countries, neighbouring countries and friends of the region, as well as international development partners.

11. Participants will be divided into two groups of countries. The first group will comprise the six core countries. At their Nairobi meeting in June 2003, the National Coordinators appointed by the core countries also proposed including Zambia in that group. The members of the first group would be expected to participate fully in the debates and present their own positions, and would be the primary signatories of any agreement or declaration emanating from the conference. The second group of countries will consist of observers. Their full role and function remain to be more clearly defined. The group will include neighbouring and other African countries (Angola, Central African Republic, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zimbabwe) and bilateral and multilateral development partners. Some of the neighbouring countries have expressed the wish to play a more active role.

Structure

12. The conference is not a one-time event but a process consisting of several stages. It will be structured around a preparatory process that would culminate in two summits. The preparatory process will involve meetings of national preparatory committees and a regional preparatory committee, as well as a set of thematic meetings (subregional organizations, women, youth).

13. *Thematic meetings*. The meeting with subregional organizations aims at mapping out each organization's programmes and projects in the Great Lakes region, to avoid duplication and to coordinate their efforts in support of the conference. The aim of the meetings on women and youth is to ensure that gender and youth concerns are addressed by the conference. The gender perspective was taken into account in all the initiatives taken in the past months in support of the conference. My Special Representative has been working closely with my Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and with the United Nations

Development Fund for Women and with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In his consultations with the core countries, my Special Representative has also been encouraging them to address gender issues and ensure that women are effectively represented at all levels of the process, starting with the national preparatory committees.

14. *National preparatory committees*. The main objective of the national preparatory committees is to allow national Governments to develop their policies and positions, review proposals, and carry out activities for effective participation in the meetings of the regional preparatory committees.

15. *Regional preparatory committee*. Three meetings of the regional preparatory committee are being planned. It is composed of the national preparatory committees of the core countries. The principal aim of the meetings of the regional preparatory committee will be to offer a forum where the work of the national preparatory committees will be discussed and articulated from a regional perspective. The first meeting will be a brainstorming session on the priorities defined by each national preparatory committee for the four themes of the conference. The second and third meetings are expected to finalize — on the basis of the recommendations of the first meeting — four documents pertaining respectively to the four themes of the conference. The outcome of the meetings of the regional preparatory committee would be submitted to the two summits that would follow the preparatory process.

16. *Two summits*. Each summit will be preceded by a meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs. The first summit would adopt a declaration of principles that would set the priorities. The second summit, a few months later, would adopt concrete plans of action as prepared by the standing inter-ministerial committees that will meet between the two summits. The declaration together with the plans of action would constitute the Stability, Security and Development Pact.

17. After the holding of the conference, it might be useful to have an evaluation process which could take the form of periodic meetings attended by the countries of the region, development partners, the African Union and the United Nations.

Tentative timetable

18. In the light of the meeting of National Coordinators held at Nairobi in June 2003 and of the current situation on the ground in the region, the following is a tentative timetable of the main events of the preparatory process for the months ahead:

- November 2003: completion of the setting up of the national preparatory committees
- December 2003: meeting with regional organizations
- December 2003: first meeting of the regional preparatory committee
- January 2004: meeting of women's organizations
- February 2004: second meeting of the regional preparatory committee
- Date to be determined: youth festival
- April 2004: third meeting of the regional preparatory committee
- May 2004: first meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs

- June 2004: first summit of heads of State, to adopt general principles and directives
- Following the first summit: series of meetings of the standing inter-ministerial committees and civil society, to translate the outcome of the preparatory process and of the first summit into policies (programmes, projects and activities)
- Date to be determined: second meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs
- Date to be determined: second summit of heads of State

19. The schedule is being kept tight in order to meet the target of holding the first summit in June 2004. It is important for the actors of the region to see this first summit as a major benchmark that could be attained in the not-too-distant future.

V. Regional ownership and international partnership

Regional ownership

20. It is important to reaffirm the importance of the ownership of the whole process by the core countries of the Great Lakes region. This principle is further reinforced by the active involvement of the African Union as a full partner as well as the involvement of neighbouring countries.

21. The African Union represented by its Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region has been a partner of the United Nations at every stage of the process. The political will to enhance this partnership has been reaffirmed during recent consultations that my Special Representative had with the current Chairman of the African Union, President Joaquim A. Chissano of Mozambique, and the newly elected Chairperson of the AU Commission, Alpha Oumar Konare.

22. In addition to the appointment of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, the African Union intends shortly to appoint professional staff in Nairobi, whose mandate will be to support the process and further enhance cooperation between the two organizations on a daily basis. Another aspect of this United Nations/AU partnership is to encourage and coordinate the contributions of various regional and subregional African organizations and programmes, such as the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Economic Community of the Great Lake Countries, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, the African Development Bank and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

23. After consulting the heads of State of the core countries, my Special Representative has been consulting, together with the AU representative, the neighbouring countries. In 2002 and 2003, the joint United Nations/AU delegation visited Angola, Gabon, Mozambique, Namibia, the Congo, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The authorities of the Central African Republic could not be consulted as the country was experiencing political turmoil at the time of the visit. Other neighbouring countries and friends, namely Ethiopia, Nigeria and the Sudan, will be consulted in the near future. The countries consulted gave their full backing to the proposed international conference and underlined its urgency. They were all interested in being invited to the conference.

International partnership

24. In addition to ensuring regional ownership of the process, it will be important to mobilize international support. While the Governments of the region bear the prime responsibility for consolidating peace and ensuring stability, security and development, the international community has a duty to assist them at all levels, as it has done and is doing in other parts of the world. The international conference is a unique opportunity to achieve this objective.

25. The core countries supported the idea of the strong involvement of the international community in the whole process. The Executive Council of the African Union (Maputo, July 2003) urgently appealed to the international community, especially bilateral and multilateral partners, to provide their support and political, diplomatic, technical and financial assistance towards the preparation, holding and follow-up on the international conference thereby ensuring its success (decision 45 (III)).

26. A self-constituted Group of Friends of the Great Lakes region is being established under Canada's facilitation. Its objective is to work out coordinated ways of providing political, diplomatic, financial and technical support to the conference. To help mobilize international support, my Special Representative visited several bilateral and multilateral development partners (Canada, United States of America, Switzerland, Commonwealth, European Commission, International Organization of la Francophonie, International Monetary Fund, World Bank). He also intends to visit other countries in Europe and Asia. The contribution of the international community will be critical to the success of the conference and to the implementation of its outcomes both as a support tool to peace processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi and to the stability, security and development of the Great Lakes region as a whole.

27. Within the United Nations system, it is important that United Nations agencies contribute to the process leading to the conference in a coordinated manner. To that end, my Special Representative is coordinating with the relevant United Nations agencies, through the inter-agency steering group which he established in Nairobi, and is collaborating closely with the United Nations Office in Burundi and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as with UNDP resident coordinators in the core countries. Furthermore, periodic progress reports will be submitted to the Security Council to keep it updated and actively involved in the process.

VI. Observations

28. I believe that the stage has now been set for the preparations for the conference to proceed as planned. There is a new momentum in the region on which it is important to capitalize: a Transitional Government has been set up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the Burundi peace process continues to move in the right direction; and general elections have been held in Rwanda. The holding of the conference would therefore undoubtedly consolidate national peace processes, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, and would add a regional dimension to building peace, security, economic development and regional integration in the whole region.

29. As in any undertaking of this nature, however, there are challenges and constraints, internal and external, which need to be tackled. The degree of progress in the following areas could influence the timing of the whole process, including the preparatory phase and the holding of the two summits: further developments in the peace processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi; coordination among international actors who support the process, including organizations of the United Nations system; the speed with which the core countries set up their national preparatory committees or implement the decisions and outcomes of the three regional preparatory committee meetings; and adequate financial, technical and human resources. It is important that the Office of my Special Representative for the Great Lakes region be provided with adequate resources so that it can meet the increasing demands that the launching of the preparatory process prompted, and carry out the preparatory activities for the conference in a timely manner.

30. To ensure the success of the conference, I urge the core countries to focus on the priorities of the conference in order to formulate concrete and feasible policies, programmes, projects and activities in the four proposed thematic areas. I intend to seek the political commitment of the international community and its financial support for the conference; to work closely with the African Union towards the attainment of the objectives of the conference; to ensure better coordination among all relevant United Nations agencies, programmes and funds in support of the conference; and to brief the Security Council on a regular basis on developments leading to the holding of the conference.

31. At the same time, it is important that the Security Council renew its engagement and its full political support to the conference; urge all other actors who may have related initiatives in the Great Lakes region to work and coordinate closely with my Special Representative; and invite the development partners to assist in providing the required political and diplomatic support as well as the financial and human resources that an international conference of this nature and magnitude would require.